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REPRINTED FROM THE AMERICAN ANTIQUARIAN, SEPTEMBER, 1855

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SHAMANISTIC CEREMONIES AMONG  
THE OJIBWAS

BY HARLAN I. SMITH

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CERTAIN SHAMANISTIC CEREMONIES AMONG  
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AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY, NEW YORK.

In the vicinity of Saginaw Bay and its tributaries there still exist small, isolated bands of Ojibwa Indians, many living upon their own land, somewhat as do the poorer class of white farmers. They still retain some of their old customs, and although most of them are nominally Methodists, a surprisingly large number, on close acquaintance, reveal the fact that the influence and many of the old superstitions of the Midé still survive. These are overshadowed by white customs and Methodist teachings, except to him who penetrates into their innermost life as a friend, taking them as they are, and without attempting to change them.

Naturally the younger individuals, mingling more with the whites and being educated at government or public schools, do not acquire the knowledge of the language, or, much less, the ancient ceremonies and folk-lore of their ancestors.

From some of the older people and early settlers have been secured stray instances of shamanistic ceremonies practiced upon the sick. Disconnected as these may be, and premature as a description may seem, I have thought best to make them known, without waiting for further study, in order that they may be available to others.

Mr. Joseph Compau, a French fur trader, who settled in this region when it belonged to the Indians, told me that, about 1841, while living upon the Cass River, about ten miles above Saginaw, he was very sick with a severe pain for three or four days. At that time Mishégashing, an old shaman, whose son now lives in Isabella County, came from near Tuscola. He brought a hollow bone about six inches long, the size of one's finger, and without administering any drug, or going through noticeable movements or singing, he pressed the bone against Mr. Compau's side and sucked through it very hard. He then

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\*Presented before the Section of Anthropology of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, at the 45th meeting, Buffalo, 1896.

showed him a piece of black material, resembling charcoal, which he claimed to have sucked out of him through the tube, and persuaded Mr. Compau that it had been the cause of the pain, which would soon cease. Mr. Compau at once felt better and soon recovered. He said he fully believed in the cure.

In August, 1896, from the old shaman, Katimshiwa, now professing to be a devout Methodist, I secured a bone tube, which he claimed was the one he used for the removal of disease and pain. He was so sick and infirm as to be unable to talk much, and left me in doubt as to the exact way in which he employed the tube. Although undoubtedly it was used in the well-known way for sucking out the disease spirit, yet from his feeble attempts at explanation, and from what he told me on former visits, I am led to believe that he also had it for other mystic rites. This tube was deposited in the American Museum of Natural History, New York. Cat. No. 4337.

Mr. Lemorandi, who is of Ojibwa and French origin, and who has lived and traded with the Indians for many years, told me the following: Nachchicome, who lived at the Poyganing Settlement between Saginaw and Bay City, was sick, and Saganima, a shaman of the Northern Peninsula, came to see him. After singing all around him, he went to the sick man and said: "I do not wonder you are sick. You have lost your soul and are about to die. A raven took your soul away from you. I can get it back." Saganima then went to the mystic wigwam he had made for the purpose, and went through his ceremonial formula of words. He then transformed himself into a hawk, and flew up and away after Nachchicome's soul. He soared over the middle of Lake Huron, where he saw the raven, darted upon him, and wrested the stolen soul from him. He put it in a small box so it could not escape, and carried it back to the mystic wigwam. Here he assumed his original form, then went to the now nearly expired Nachchicome saying, "I secured your soul." He then sang, and telling the sick man to open his mouth, blew in the lost soul, and Nachchicome was well again.

Mr. Lemorandi is also authority for the following: when he was buying furs near Mt. Pleasant in the spring while the Indians were making maple sugar, Sinogemaw's squaw was very sick, and was going to die. They sent for Shawanasowa, an old shaman, who came in a canoe with Mr. Lemorandi and began his ceremony with singing and the use of various little

charms. He then told them her soul was gone, that another shaman Nagaek had taken it, because he was angry. Shawanasowa was more powerful than Nagaek, and in the night went, by some superhuman power, several hundred miles to visit him. He obtained her soul, placed it in a small box for safety, and brought it back. He had the squaw open her mouth, and blew in the soul. She recovered and lived to be an old woman.

Mrs. Eva Golson, the daughter of an early pioneer, told me that as late as in 1866, when her mother was living at the mouth of the Cass River, and was sick with "chills and fever," she went for an Ojibwa shaman, after failing to get relief from her own people. When he came he refused to perform his ceremonies over her because she was a woman, and said his squaw doctored women, he cured men. He went for his squaw and returned in about two weeks, having waited for the time most favorable for the cure. Two squaws came with him. After bringing them he went away in his canoe, but returned for them when they were through. The old squaw began by covering her patient with many blankets. Then she made her a drink by boiling powdered "herbs, barks and roots." After part of this had been swallowed the remainder was placed under the blankets and left to steam, while the blankets were kept down tight. Then these blankets were removed, one by one, until about the usual bed covering remained. This occupied about four hours of the afternoon. She came the next day, found her patient well, and, receiving her compensation, went her way.

From Katimshiwa have also been obtained specimens of his medicines.